

The Son of Man in Heaven

Acts 1 - 9.

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Article 42 of 47 **Short Meditations**

(Cavenagh, 1866.)

The second of St. Luke's letters to his friend Theophilus, does not stiffly and formally take up the inspired narrative, where the first of them had left it; there is rather an easy and graceful intertwining or intervolving of the two: the second going back a little into the scenes and the seasons which closed the first, giving them the same general character with a few faint distinguishing features. But each of these letters, "the Gospel by Luke," and "the Acts of the Apostles," has of course, as I need not say, its own proper subject.

In the early chapters of the second of them, that is, of "the Acts of the Apostles," and to which I am now, for a little, addressing myself, we get an account of Jesus as *Man glorified in the heavens*; as in the early chapters of the first of them we got an account of God *manifest in flesh on the earth*. I mean, this is characteristic, severally, of each of them. The Person is, surely, one and the same in both; the God-Man.

We learn many things connected with the Son of Man in heaven, from the Evangelists, where that mystery is anticipated now and again. The Lord Himself tells us that He is to be seen there by faith all through this present age, seated at the right hand of power; and that in due time He will come forth from thence in the clouds of heaven. (Matt. 26: 64) He tells us also, that when He has come forth, He will sit on the throne of His glory. (Matt. 25: 31) These are but mere samples of the way in which this great mystery was thus anticipated. But the Person seen in the Evangelists is God manifested in the flesh, and as such in action on the earth. In these chapters in the Acts, which succeeds the Evangelists, it is, on the other hand, Man glorified in heaven, and acting there.

In Acts 1, Jesus of Nazareth, who was God manifest in flesh here, is seen ascending, the heavens.

In Acts 2, the promised Spirit is given, and Peter begins his preaching by taking this gift, according to the prophecy of Joel, as his text. And after reciting it, he says, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." And he then shows, from the sixteenth and one hundred and tenth Psalms, that this Man thus approved of God on earth, Was now raised from the dead and glorified at the right hand of God in heaven.

Thus the mystery is established, the mystery of the Son of Man, Jesus of Nazareth, exalted in the heavens. Then, as the Evangelists had already looked at Jesus as He walked, and ministered, and toiled, and suffered here on earth, so now in his preaching in this and in the following chapters, Peter gives us some of the ways and virtues of this same Jesus now ascended into heaven.

Thus, in Acts 2, with Joel still as his text, he tells us, that He is the God mentioned in that prophecy, who has now sent down the Spirit. According to Joel, therefore, it is the God of Israel who does this great Pentecostal wonder; according to Peter, it is the Man now in heaven that does it.

This is surely a magnificent way in which to begin the story of the virtues and glories of Jesus of Nazareth, now glorified on high at God's right hand; where also Peter declares Him to be seated, till the day come for making His foes His footstool, as the "My Lord," of the hundred and tenth Psalm. And then, on the authority of these things, he calls the whole house of Israel, to own the once crucified Man to be both Lord and Christ. And when a number of his hearers are aroused by this preaching, he publishes to them the virtue of "the name" of this glorified One, that it can secure eternal life and the gift of the Spirit to all sinners who receive it.

Then, in Acts 3, this same Apostle tells us several other great things of Jesus in the heavens — that it was His name, through faith in it, that had just healed the lame Beggar at the gate of the Temple — that He was the Prophet promised by Moses in Deuteronomy 18 — that the heavens are now retaining Him, but that He is again to leave them in due season, and to bring times of refreshing and the restitution of all things, with Him back to the earth.

Then, in Acts 4, he preaches through this same Jesus, "the resurrection from the dead" — and further proclaims, that He was "the Head of the corner," according to Psalm 118, and the only One set of God for salvation in this guilty world. And toward the close of this chapter, he and his fellow-saints at Jerusalem lay the name of this same Jesus before the Lord God, the Maker of the heaven and the earth, as all their confidence and title to blessing.

Then, in Acts 5, Peter and the other Apostles testify in the face of the Jewish council, that this same blessed One whom they had slain and hanged on a tree, God had exalted with His right hand to be both a Prince and a Saviour, everything indeed to Israel, whether for blessing or government.

After these manners, in the course of this preaching, we get a large and varied testimony to the Man in heaven. Well may it follow the ineffably weighty and blessed testimony of the Evangelists to the Son of the Father, God manifest in flesh, on earth. But here, with this fifth chapter, the Apostolic *testimony* under the given Spirit ends. We pass from it to a *vision*. For after this hearing about the glorified Man, we are given, for a little moment, a *sight* of Him. Peter had been preaching Him, Stephen is now to see Him. They are alike witnesses, though in different ways, to the same great mystery, that the Son of Man was in heaven at the right hand of God. Stephen is borne by wicked men outside the city to be stoned, while his face is shining like that of an angel; and his eye is opened, and he looks up to and within an opened heaven — "and there sees the glory of God, and Jesus, "the Son of Man," standing at the right hand of God.

Thus is the Man in heaven testified by the eye of Stephen as He had been by the lips of Peter. The Spirit fills the one with an inspired tale about Him, and God opens the eye of the other with a glorious sight of Him. But the object is the same — the glorified Man, the Son of Man in heaven, Jesus of Nazareth at the right hand of the majesty on high — the One, who having been "God manifest in the flesh" here, humbled, serving, crucified, buried, and raised again, was now in His Manhood exalted to the highest place of honour there.

One thing, however, still remains in the revelation of this great mystery. In Acts 9, this glorified Man comes down from heaven, and shows Himself, for a little moment, here on earth. In holy, peaceful glory, and in the attitude of one that was receiving him to Himself with a blissful and perfect welcome, He had just been seen, as in His due place in heaven, by His *suffering saint*. But now, in terrible majesty, in the burning brightness of judicial glory, He is seen by *the persecutor of His saint*, here on earth. He thus appears as One ready and all-powerful to avenge the blood of His slaughtered flock. Mercy indeed shall rejoice over judgment in the present case, and the persecutor shall become a Witness and an Apostle; but the vision tells us, that the Maxi in heaven waits there, as in other

characters, so in this, the Avenger, in due time, of the wrongs done in the earth. This is so, and this is here pledged and foreshadowed. For we know that Jesus has ascended in various characters. He has ascended as to His native place, the glory He had with the Father ere the world was — He has ascended to prepare mansions in the Father's house for the elect — He has ascended as their Forerunner — He has ascended to sit in the God-pitched Tabernacle as our High Priest — He has ascended as the Author and Finisher of faith, and as the Purger of sins — but He has ascended also to take His place as Adonai at the right hand of Jehovah, till He make His foes His footstool. And this last character He must return to earth to fulfil, as now He comes down to the road which lay between Jerusalem and Damascus to give, as it were, a sample of this, and to put the sentence of death in this persecuting Saul of Tarsus.